

RAWDON'S RAID. A STORY OF THE SNOW.

From London Society. [CONCLUDED FROM YESTERDAY.] "What's been the matter, Mignonette?" Helen whispered as she came up to Hilda by the fire, and Marsden stalked away stolidly in his varnished boots. "Have you tried him?" Hilda shook her head.

"He has been telling me that I wasn't to go to-night, that's all," she answered. "Ordered me not to go," and he said, for the last time, "Now then!" Dick Jocelyn breaks in, "Come and be wrapped up, you two. Lady Jocelyn's carriage stops the way. Perhaps you'll give my lady your arm Marsden. Don and I will see after the girls."

"Really, Richard," began that faded beauty of the baths, "Lady Hope, 'I think they'd better let the carriage come back for them.'" "Wait till it gets there, first, chère tante! You don't know what the roads are like to-night. Better let us come back for you. But don't keep the horses standing, if you mean to go, I advise you. Now, Marsden, look alive, will you?" The irreverent youth went on, "Ah! here's Don, in his Canadian get up."

Rawdon came in with a fur pelisse over his head, and another over his arm. "I think this won't crush you very much, Miss Jocelyn," he said, in his tranquil way, going straight up to Hilda: "It is very warm and very light. Let me put it on for you." He wrapped the lovely seal about her tenderly under Marsden's hostile eyes and my lady's.

The Lombard street platoon cared as much, I verily believe, for the girl as he could care for anything but himself; though to "form" her for his wife he had, in his eternal self-assertion, tyrannized over her till she simply hated him; and, seeing another perform what should have been his duty—watching her face when she met Rawdon's look—a feeling of simple dislike he had always been conscious of for the Sabreur grew sharply into a stronger, and to him a very strange one—jealousy.

Yes, Jeffrey Marsden hated the man jealously now. Was he, who had undermined his authority over his future wife? Did he actually dare to—? He tries to stifle that half-formed thought his overweening pride revolted as so angrily. "But there shall be no more of this!" he said to himself as he led Lady Hope out to the carriage. The Pierpont women and the other four followed.

Dick was right about the night: it was splendid. Clear, calm, moonlit, with the thermometer down a dozen degrees below zero. A sparkling snow mantle covered the deer-park and the hills beyond; feather flakes of snow draped every tree. Just the night for a sleigh drive, as Dick remarked.

The two sleighs were waiting just behind my lady's family ark of a carriage. Lovers silver collar-bells rang out musically as the mare tossed her head and snorted, hearing her master's voice.

"Keep close to us, Richard," my lady said, as she settled herself in her corner; "and take care of Hilda, mind." The family ark moved on a little, and then waited till the others were ready.

Dick Jocelyn lifted his charge in his strong arms, and carried her down the steps to her place in his own sleigh, and rolled the great buffalo-robe round her. Miss Carew followed, on the foot-cloth, under Don's escort.

"All right!" Dick inquired, taking his reins. "Go on, Johnson!" and the expedition started.

The great ark lumbered along with a tortoise-like deliberation; the two sleighs slid smoothly after. Down the Long Avenue, through the Lodge gates, into the iron-bound road, with a wall of snow a dozen feet high on either side, stretching and winding away yonder like a narrow white ribbon.

In the ark, the Pierpont women did all the talking; my lady was sulky with cold, and Marsden sulky with drink.

"Well, Mignonette!" Dick said presently, to his silent companion, "it's all settled, ain't it?" "O Dick," she whispered out of her furs, "how can I?"

"You will, though!" was the wise youth's mental reply. "And so, my dear Miss Carew," was how Don finished a long answer to certain objections—urged, half of them, it must be confessed, merely pro forma—which Helen had raised. "And so I really don't see what else we are to do—do you, now? Hilda's no chance with my lady; she stays here, nor have I. They'll marry her to this—this man Marsden. Think what that would be for both of us! My plan saves us both. Everything's arranged. If she says yes, you won't say no?" I don't," said Miss Carew.

In due time the "Dane Court expedition arrived at Boodle Park.

I shall be waiting with her, and looking out for you. When I see you I'll stop, and get her out of the room in the general scurramong without being noticed. Then on with those sealskin swaddling clothes, into the sleigh, and—fouette cocher! We ought to be half-way to Calais before any one but you and Miss Carew's the wiser. "But, I say, 'All right!' Dick nodded. "But, I say, Don, she won't hang back at the last moment, eh? It's now or never for you, you know. You won't get a chance like this again. And women are queer cattle."

"I don't think she will," Rawdon said, looking up the room towards her. "She might under other circumstances, perhaps, but not now. Marsden has managed matters too well for that. The pompous bully would drive a woman to anything. He was hectoring her about coming here to-night before we started, just as if she didn't hate him already! The man's been playing my game all through; my last move will checkmate him. It's time to play it. You've ten minutes to see to the sleigh, and I to dance number nineteen. Go along, old boy!"

"Now tread me a measure, quoth young Lochinvar," hummed Dick, as he turned to go. "Wonder whether he's ever heard of that song, old—? Ah! beg your pardon, Marsden," he ejaculated with unwonted civility, as he ran against the Countess, returning from his hunt for Lady Hope's carriage. "Hope I didn't hurt you! All right, Don!"

and the guardsman moved off to fulfil his part in the plot, chucking at intervals over old Jeff's approaching discomfiture. Rawdon went straight towards Hilda. Marsden followed.

"Well, dear," Helen whispered in her cousin's ear rather anxiously, "will you?" A pressure of the hand she clung to was all the other's answer. Then Helen felt her start nervously, and saw her turn pale, and then flush feverishly. She had caught sight of Don making his way round the outside of the circle to where they three were still standing. Miss Carew's own pulse quickened sharply. The decisive moment was all but come.

"Where can Mr. Marsden be?" snapped Lady Hope, querulously. "What a time he is seeing about the carriage! Ah! there he is at last."

There he was, close behind Rawdon; whom Lady Hope overlooked till she heard him speaking to Hilda.

"Number nineteen," Don was saying, "our valise, you know, Miss Jocelyn."

"Poor child! How much those quiet commonplace words meant to her! The crisis had arrived. If she took his arm now she gave consent to that plan for saving her he had proposed. If she refused it—what was left to her?"

"You had better let me take you to the cloak-room, I think," rasped Marsden's saw of a voice, wondrously apropos; "the carriage will be ready directly, I believe," it added, as the speaker turned to my lady.

"Then we had better go," Lady Hope assented. "Will you take Hilda?"

This was pointedly at Rawdon, who showed no signs of giving way. Marsden advanced a little. It was with his most insufferable air of proprietorship that he thought fit to say— "Excuse me, Major Daringham. Now, Hilda, come!" And he put his arm out stiffly for her to take.

As Don had said, the man couldn't help playing his opponent's game. That *Ulysses* in the drawing-room at Dane Court just now even hadn't taught him better than to take this tone to the girl a second time that night. He fancied, perhaps, that with my lady to back him, she must submit to him this time, and give him a pleasant triumph over the man he hated. So his tone and manner towards her were simply unbearable. If she ever had hesitated, hesitation was past now. If he ever could have kept her, he had lost her in that moment. She lifted her head; her eyes met Don's; and Don read her decision plainly in them.

A light came suddenly into his; but it was in a fatal impossible fashion that he struck in, sure of winning now.

"Afraid I can't forego my engagement and lose number nineteen, if Miss Jocelyn decides for me," he said. "I don't think the carriage can get up for ten minutes or so, you know, Lady Hope," he added, blandly; "and so—"

"Excuse me," Marsden said, with his severest, iciest hauteur, "but Miss Jocelyn really cannot—"

looking about her anxiously a little in the rear. "Miss Jocelyn passed through the hall this moment," Marsden added. "You must have seen her; and—Major Daringham." The last words seemed to choke him.

"Where are they, then?" Lady Hope snapped. "I can't find Hilda in the cloak-room. They say she's not there. Where can she be?"

Dick faced the two, stroking his mustache calmly, but with an odd twinkle in his eyes. "Gone!"

The same word from all three, but in very different keys.

"Really—" began Marsden with a portentous severity that hugely amused Dick. The platoon didn't understand. My lady, with the clairvoyance of a woman of the world, and out of half-formed suspicions of her own, understood everything in a moment. She glanced round first to see that no one was within hearing; then she said in savage staccato to her nephew, "I'll never forgive you for this, sir, as long as I live."

"Dear me, chère tante! What have I done?" returned the guileless youth, not quite certain whether, as he expressed it, "my lady was fly to all the little game yet."

She wasted no time on him. Her hand grasped Marsden's arm with an energy that startled that emotionless man. Bona fides, though, no longer; for her words startled him even more.

"Don't you see?" my lady was whispering impatiently. "She's gone—with him. They've eloped! Now listen—she had started at her as though she had suddenly gone mad. She really thought she had! What! His promised wife dare so far forget what was due to him as to elope!"

"Listen!" Lady Hope repeated, actually shaking him in her impatience. "This must be prevented. They must be overtaken, stopped! At any risk; at once! You must do it."

"I?" Jeffrey Marsden gasped. "You. Who else is there? Richard is in the plot. In another hour it may be too late. Quick, man! Quick!"

He was beginning, electrified by this languid woman's fierce, unwonted energy, to understand now. He had been robbed, and by the man he hated most. For the second or third time that night the snow-water in his veins ran almost warm. She saw his face change.

"Will you go? To save her—to defeat him, remember! There may be time yet."

"Yes!" he muttered between his blanched, lean lips; "you're right. There may be time yet; and if I overtake him—I'll go! But, how—where?"

She had thought of everything, this clever Lady Hope, omniscient almost in her self-interest.

"The other sleigh!" she answered: "It's ready down there, by this time. Didn't you hear him order it? Follow the track. They have gone to Ashbridge, I am nearly sure. There is no train yet; you must prevent this! But don't waste time! You have your coat and hat! Quick!"

"Never fear!" he returned; and the blanched lips were actually quivering on a oath; "I'll do it!"

He flung his coat about him, and hurried through the inner glass doors out on to the steps.

Dick, explaining matters to Helen *sotto voce*, had kept an eye on him all the time.

"Let me see about the carriage, Aunt Hope!" he observed. "Poor dear old Jeff will catch his death of cold if you trot him about on a night like this."

He moved away in pursuit; though rather wondering what Jeff could possibly do, you know, after all.

Lady Hope caught him just as he was pushing open the doors that Marsden had just swung back. Through them he saw the latter rush down the steps and leap (actually leap!) into his (Jocelyn's) sleigh, in readiness, as my lady had foreseen, below, saw the horse plunge and spring forward under the whip; saw his man get knocked backwards and loose his hold on the reins, and Jeffrey Marsden drive furiously off and disappear.

"Oh! by Jove! you know—" Dick began. "Lady Hope stopped him.

"Silence, sir!" she said; "do you want all the world to know this? I sent him to stop them. And he will."

"Will he?" thought Dick; "he'll probably break his own neck in the first five minutes, that's all!" The thought of Jeffrey Marsden driving a sleigh about the country in the dead of night, and coming to frightful grief against a gate-post or in a side-drift, caused Ensign and Lieutenant Richard Jocelyn to laugh aloud.

"Take us to the carriage, sir!" his relative said, majestically; "whatever happens, we had better not stay here."

They were all back again at Dane Court when they heard what had happened.

Swiftly, smoothly, flinging up a little shower of snow spray, and leaving a straight track behind it, that did credit to Jeffrey's steering, faster and faster, as Lucia warmed to her work, between the high snow walls on either hand, the sleigh that carried Lady Mignonette and her Lochinvar whirled along the white solitary road that led straight to the Ashbridge station, four or five miles off.

Muffled in her furs, and with the great buffalo robe over her, Hilda lay back, only answering her lover's attempts to reassure her by a little sob now and then. The excitement of the last hour or two had been a little too much for the child.

"But it's all right now, darling!" Rawdon said pleasantly, taking a pull at the mare as he topped the one long hill that lay between Boodle Park and Ashbridge—"It's all right, now. We shall be at the D'Arbleys by dinner-time, comfortably. I've telegraphed to her to meet us at the Nord terminus. She's about the only relation I've got left; and, as she's fond of me, she'll simply worship you, you know!"

"We've managed beautifully, haven't we? Got away, and no one that matters the wiser! Jove! though, I should like to see the city man's face to-morrow, or rather this morning, when he discovers— Eh, what's that?"

He checked Lucia a moment and turned his head to listen. The ringing of gongs behind, plain enough. Round a slight bend came something dark against the snowy roadway at a furious rate after them. Another sleigh. "Dick, perhaps?" Don muttered; "but no, he wouldn't come after us; besides, he wouldn't yaw about so frightfully. That fellow's never driven a sleigh before, I should say!"

"O Don!" Hilda suggested, nervously; "suppose it should be—?"

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Two days afterwards my lady—she had managed to survive her disappointment—read her daughter's marriage in the Times. So did Marsden, and he had with him the same gloomy and a sprained ankle. So did Dick Jocelyn and Helen, lingering over their *Ulysses* breakfast in the Oak Parlor at Dane Court.

It was in that very room, by the by, that in the snow-time last year I heard from those same two people the story of RAWDON'S RAID!

LEGAL NOTICES. IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS FOR THE CITY AND COUNTY OF PHILADELPHIA. WILLIAM WRIGHTMAN, Assignee, vs. Dr. LEWIS P. GERRARD, Vend. Exp. June Term, 1868. No. 8 and 9.

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